"those enduring matinee idols"

A CHRONOLOGICAL LOOK
AT SOUND SERIALS
(1929 - 1956)

CHAPTER 19
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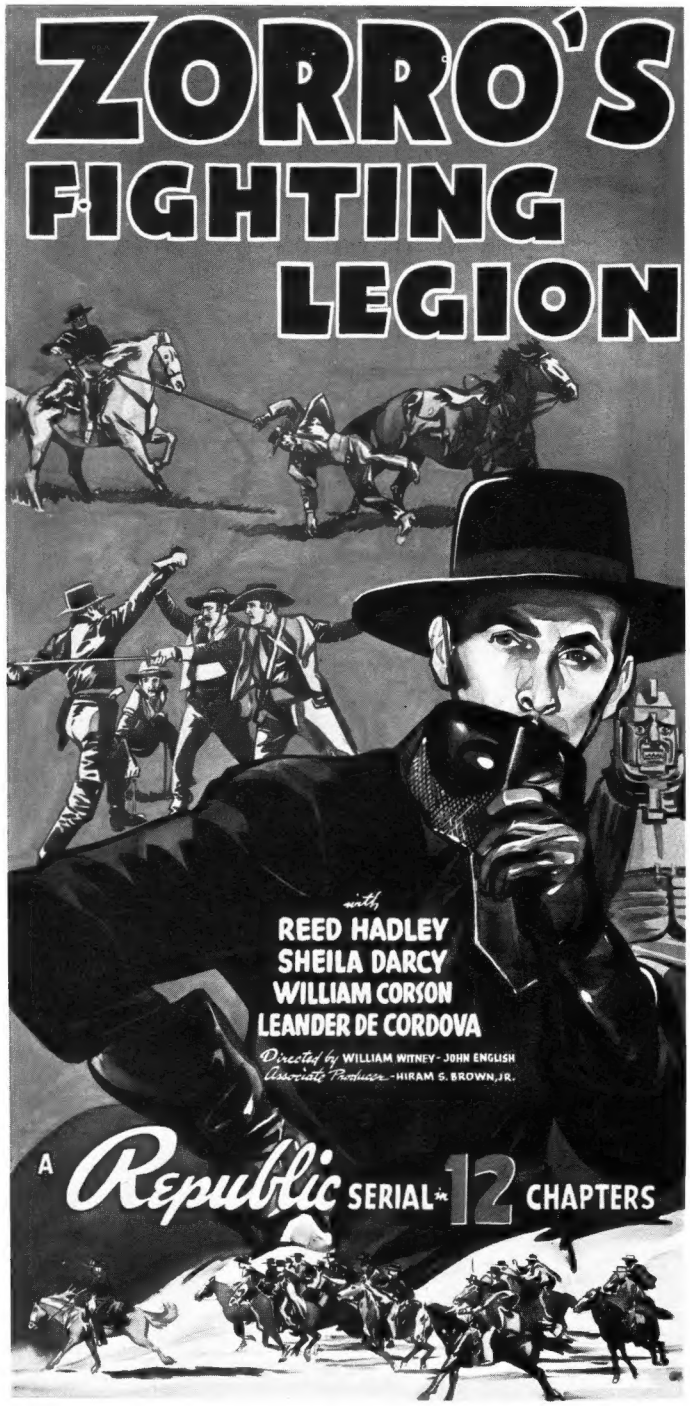
THE HURRICANE EXPRESS
Mascot, 1932 — Revisited on Page 276.
In photo are Glenn Strange
and fledgling hero John Wayne.

MASTHEAD: C. Montague Shaw — Pablo in ZORRO'S FIGHTING LEGION (Page 266)
Lane Chandler — Hickok in DEADWOOD DICK (Page 279)



Written for TEMI by BOB MALCOMSON

with Photo Assistance from Jim Stringham, John Hagner and Angel Gutierrez.

ZORRO'S FIGHTING LEGION (released December 16, 1939) deservedly ranks as number one or two among straight western serials produced by Republic Pictures. By "straight" I mean where a western setting is concerned and is devoid of airplanes and automobiles. This cannot be said of ZORRO RIDES AGAIN (pg. 138), KING OF THE TEXAS RANGERS (yet to be reported), etc.

For serial and western devotees, LEGION offered a perfect blend of ingredients: a very masculine hero who is masked, tho his identity is known from the outset; a mysterious and fascinating villain, fully cloaked in anonymity; continuous action provided by an exceptionally large cast, and representing not only the forces of law and order, but an equal number on the side of evil to balance the scales; no comedians to interrupt the narrative; a beautiful heroine assigned little to do but, well, look beautiful; a group of four conspirators, anyone of three whom survived until the finale who could logically be exposed as the culprit masquerading in a suit of armor as the nefarious Don del Oro.

Don del Oro for all intended purposes was simply a mechanical monster in appearance. We are told early in the story, albeit left-handedly, that what the Yaqui Indians have accepted as their "Golden God" is in reality a white man wearing a goldplated suit of armor. And an ingenious disguise it is. Too bad the film is in black and white and the costume shows up as silver. But that is a minor intrusion on logic.

For the record, Republic's shooting script stated thus: "He (Don del Oro) is completely clad in gold armor, with a helmet shaped like a grinning skull." Between writer's conception and costume designer's finished product, there was obviously a change (see pg. 268). Also, when Don del Oro spoke, it was the resonant voice of Billy Bletcher dubbed on the film soundtrack.

Reed Hadley played Zorro. Whoever at Republic cast him in the role should have received a 100% boost in salary. True, Reed as the fop Don Diego Vega was not especially convincing, but once he donned the mask of Zorro he did the character, and the serial, proud. His authoritative voice, and perfect diction, were later put to excellent use as the off-screen narrator on such semi-documentary features as "House on 92nd Street" and "Boomerang", and eventually in the title role of "Public Defender" on T.V. (a very fine series for its time).

William Lava helmed his last credited serial score. It was excellent. Included was his music for the Fighting Legion song. Lyrics were furnished by Eddie Cherkose, who also had a role in the proceedings as a strolling guitar player. It was his playing of that musical instrument that alerted followers of Don del Oro to assemble.

Words of the Fighting Legion song were:

We ride . . . with the wind
over hill, over dale,
with a spirit that cannot fail,
men of Zorro are we!
We ride . . . with the wind
as we go side by side,
with a song ringing far and wide,
men of Zorro are we!

Certainly not incidental to the production were William Witney and John English as co-directors; Hiram S. Brown, Jr. as Associate Producer (his first of eight); and, writers Ronald Davidson, Franklyn Adreon, Morgan Cox, Sol Shor and Barney A. Sarecky.

CHAPTER TITLES

1. **The Golden God**
2. **The Flaming "Z"**
3. **Descending Doom**
4. **The Bridge of Peril**
5. **The Decoy**
6. **Zorro To The Rescue**
7. **The Fugitive**
8. **Flowing Death**
9. **The Golden Arrow**
10. **Mystery Wagon**
11. **Face To Face**
12. **Unmasked**

THE STORY

Foreword to the serial said: "In 1810 the Mexican people revolted against centuries of tyranny." And another film frame shows the exact date of "September 16, 1810" that an uprising occurred against the Spaniards. Fact is, the manifesto for independence was dated September 16, 1811, exactly one year later. Anyway, actual independence came in 1821. Next frame reads: "By 1824 the old Spanish provinces had formed themselves into the United States of Mexico." So that date establishes the year the story is concerned with. A young patriot Benito Juarez (the script gives his age as 24, but actually in 1824 Juarez — who long later became Presidente of Mexico — would have been only 18) seeks gold to replenish the Mexican treasury since Spanish merchants have drained the country of its mineral wealth. One of the few sources for gold is a mine in the province of San Mendolita.

In an attempt to bolster attempts to ship more gold, Juarez himself visits San Mendolito and pleads with the local government (consisting of Felipe — the province governor — and councilors Don Francisco, Ramon, Gonzales, Pablo, Riccardo, Carlos and Commandante Manuel):

"My message must be direct. It must be brief. For it is a challenge. Our fight has not ended — it is just beginning. Failure already threatens our Republic — and we are not yet six months old. The problems confronting us must be solved at once, or we will lose the freedom we fought for.

"Our Republic still has internal enemies — selfish, unscrupulous, callous men! We must do away with these local rebels and their local rebellions.

"We need loyal men, and we need gold to establish our foreign credit. Your San Mendolito mine is the richest in Mexico. Its gold helped win the revolution. Its gold must now help fill the empty treasury of our new nation.

"You must not fail. As the first province to function under the new constitution, San Mendolito is now the example for every province in Mexico. Prosper! Succeed! And the other provinces will follow your example. In your hands alone rests the fate of our newborn democracy."

And in dubious hands they are placed. Altho the group pledges allegiance to Mexico's rebirth, Felipe and three of the councilors (Pablo; Commandante Manuel, head of the local cavalry; and Gonzales, manager of the gold mine) are secretly plotting against Juarez's efforts, hoping Don del Oro is successful in his revolt so they can seize power. Don del Oro's scheme is to use the Yaquis in a war to drive the fledgling Mexican government bankrupt. Then he will take over and set up a private empire, crowning himself Emperor of Mexico.

After the meeting, Don Francisco tells Juarez he has formed a band of followers to help combat the threat of a Yaqui revolt. Later, he announces to the council the existence of the group. In doing so, he seals his doom. Death comes at the Cantina de Camino, where he goes with the loyal Ramon (the youngest council member). After Francisco is stabbed by Rodriguez, the masked Zorro appears and duels Rodriguez. Once he disarms him, Zorro thrusts at Rodriguez's face with his sword and scratches a "Z" on his forehead. [Editor's Note: The shooting script said, "This should be accomplished as quickly as is practical and the line of blood should be a tracing — as from a surface scratch — so as to keep the scene wholly devoid of realistic horror."]

The masked Zorro reveals his identity to only the dying Francisco and Ramon: Don Diego Vega, nephew of Francisco. The old man asks Diego to take his place on the council. "Watch the councilors," he says. "Don del Oro is . . ." He sinks back and dies.

Zorro departs, to return later to San Mendolito, minus mask, and put on an act as a fop — a conceited, self-indulging, vain and effeminate Diego. Subversive members of the council are delighted with Francisco's replacement.

Don Diego Vega, besides replacing Francisco on the San Mendolito council, in the guise of Zorro takes over leadership of the Fighting Legion. Ramon is second in command. Oath of the Legionnaires is: "I solemnly swear to uphold the Republic of Mexico with my sword and my life. I will be loyal — and in all ways strive to be a worthy member of this Fighting Legion."

Antagonist of Zorro is Don del Oro, who has under his power a tribe of Yaqui Indians to supplement his band of renegades. Headquarters is a series of caves, the one most frequently used being called the "ceremonial cave." [Note: Throne guard center is Jerry Frank; far right is Moreno, Jim Pierce — who also played King Thun in FLASH GORDON, pg. 128.]

Tarmac (Joe Molina), leader of the Yaquis; Moreno; Tomas (Curley Dresden) and Valdez (Charles King), in the cellar of San Nicholas Mission prepare "a warm welcome for Zorro and his Legion" when they arrive at their meeting place. A slowly burning candle is used as a "timing" device to detonate a powder explosion.

The Legionnaires have been falsely summoned and find themselves in a trap: the back door to the mission barred and Yaquis and renegades outside the front door. Zorro arrives and opens the rear door to let the Legionnaires out. He goes inside to rescue a wounded Ramon, only to find the two of them trapped when the powder explodes. End of Chapter two.

Prior to the explosion, Zorro (carrying Ramon on his shoulder) wraps the end of his whip around a ceiling beam and swings across the room, the two crashing thru a stained glass window to freedom.

Foppish Diego (Reed Hadley, with gun) and Ramon (William Corson) enter the San Mendolito mine in Chapter three, under a pretext, to find one of their number. Mine manager is Gonzales (Edmund Cobb, far right), and also on the council. Salvador (Alan Gregg) is suspected of being one of Don del Oro's men since he was seen with Tarmac, who escaped. The captured Salvador is taken before . . .

. . . the San Mendolito council. About to confess some important information, Salvador is assassinated with a golden arrow that is supposedly fired from the balcony. Secret co-conspirators on the council are r. to l.: Pablo (C. Montague Shaw); Gonzales (Ed Cobb); Commandante Manuel (John Merton); and Governor Felipe (Leander de Cordova). Continuing counterclockwise are Diego, Ramon, Carlos (Theodore Lorch), and Riccardo (Norman Lane).

A munitions wagon train is taken over in Chapter five by Don del Oro's renegades led by Moreno. They kill the escort officer, Lt. Gomez, and his cavalrymen. Aware of the impending attack Zorro and the Legionnaires race hellbent to meet the train. They discover the bodies, then follow the trail of the wagons, which are found empty. Moreno's men have hidden the money. Don del Oro orders Moreno and Tarmac to take the Yaquis (and three replacement wagons) and retrieve the munitions. This they do. By now Zorro is aware of the wagon train's location.

Using his Legionnaires as a decoy, the wagons lose their protection (except for the drivers) when Moreno and the Yaquis take off in pursuit of the Legion. Zorro, and two of his men, leap from an overhanging rock onto the three wagons. Later, one of the wagons, loaded with explosives and its team unhitched, is sent careening down a slope by Moreno's men to where the Legionnaires have barricaded themselves. Moreno has set a torch to a powder keg fuse. Zorro races out, jumps from his horse into the wagon, and feverishly attempts to brake the arsenal of death. Explosion!!

Before jumping clear in Chapter six, Zorro is successful in veering the wagon away from where the Legionnaires are entrenched. Ramon and his sister Volita (Sheila Darcy) are taken prisoners and placed in a torture chamber. [L. to r. are heavies Tomas, Rico (Al Taylor), and Cisco, who want to know Zorro's identity. How Ramon and Volita, gagged, can possibly respond is beyond comprehension.]

Zorro appears, but is trapped in another room. The villains, using a windlass, set one of the walls in motion. Relentlessly, and slowly, the wall inches across the room. Zorro attempts to use a wooden bed, as a wedge, to stop its movement. The bed buckles and collapses. At the blackout, Zorro is straining helplessly to keep from being crushed.

In Chapter seven, Zorro pries an oblong flagstone from the floor and places it between the walls. It works!

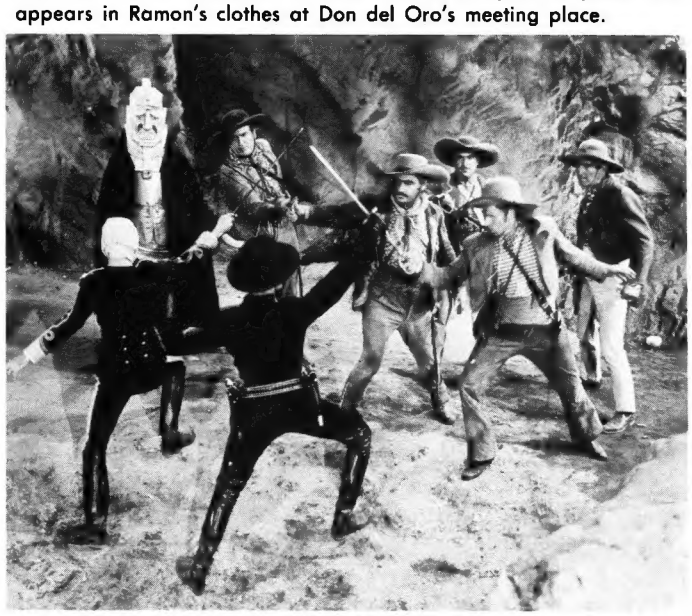
At a council meeting in Chapter seven, Diego traps Commandante Manuel (John Merton) into exposing himself as, at minimum, a confederate of Don del Oro, and possibly even the man behind the gold-plated armor. Manuel flees the room to the balcony outside, and jumps to a waiting stagecoach. Soon after Zorro is in pursuit.

[Editor's Note: For those who like action in their westerns, particularly serials, the cliff-hanger for this episode offered a truly breakneck pace. That stuntmen Bill Yrigoyen (as the stagecoach driver) and Yakima Canutt (doubling Reed Hadley) performed without injury, especially Canutt, is a credit to the individual, yet wonderfully coordinated, talents of these two men.]

Zorro transfers from El Rey to the stagecoach's first pair of horses. He grabs onto the linkage between the lead horses, drops to the ground while the team of horses and coach pass over him, then (in Chapter eight) grabs a hold on the reach of the stagecoach and pulls himself aboard.

[Editor's Note: Interestingly, this is the only cliff-hanger at variance with the shooting script — and certainly superior to what was originally planned. The writers had Zorro on an overhanging ledge that gives way, catapulting him down a bank and onto a roadbed. As Zorro rises to his elbows, a stagecoach, six up — and not four horses as used in the Canutt caper — bears directly down upon him. Called for in the next episode are the six horses and coach passing over him without inflicting injury.]

After disposing of the driver, Zorro leaps on the team and brings them to a halt. However, the coach (with Manuel aboard) breaks loose, rolls down a bank and crashes at the bottom. Ramon appears. Zorro comes up with the scheme of leaving the injured Manuel under guard with a friend, and taking Ramon in his place to the San Mendolito jail. A bandaged face and a change to Manuel's uniform would be a perfect disguise. Zorro will watch the jail and when Don del Oro's men come to rescue "Manuel" he will follow, hopefully to the master villain's hideout. The ruse works. However, the real Manuel escapes his guard and appears in Ramon's clothes at Don del Oro's meeting place.

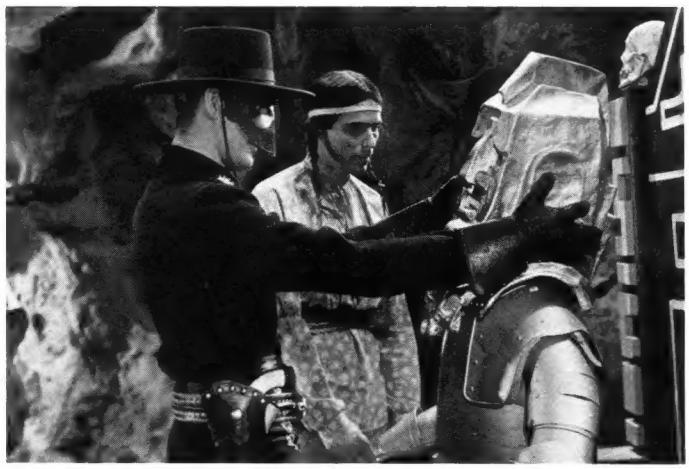


Don del Oro is furious and orders the execution of both Ramon and Manuel (an alleged traitor). Meanwhile Zorro has entered the cave. A sword fight breaks out, during which Zorro and Ramon are forced into a small tunnel. Don del Oro orders, during the melee, some of his henchmen to remove a dike that will flood the tunnel. Zorro and Ramon are caught up in the roaring torrent of water when they try to outrun it and reach a dead-end in the tunnel. Fortunately, they surface in an air pocket, then fill their lungs with air and swim underwater to safety. Next they come upon Manuel. As Manuel is about to reveal Don del Oro's identity, he is killed by a golden arrow.

Don del Oro is determined to get guns and ammunition for the Yaquis so that "under my leadership, you can drive every white man from the country. And when I become Emperor of Mexico, you will again be free to live on the lands of your fathers." He orders his henchmen plus Kala, an Indian, to go to the armory in San Mendolito and steal arms. There they are surprised by Zorro and a fight ensues. Kala is knocked out, and Zorro is hit from behind with a quirt and rendered unconscious. He is thrown into a water wagon just as soldiers appear. Tomas claims he caught the Indian trying to steal guns. The renegades take off with the wagon. At the end of Chapter ten, it is seen (with Zorro inside) going over a cliff and into a lake. He does manage to break a hole in the tank and swim to safety.

Kala (Paul Marion) is to be tried (in Chapter 11) by the council for stealing firearms. He is revealed as the "hereditary leader" of the Yaquis, which fits conveniently into the plans of council members Felipe, Pablo and Gonzales. Since he is beloved by the Indians, they champion his public hanging knowing full well the Yaquis will storm and overrun San Mendolito in their rage.

Zorro arranges with some of his Legionnaires to rescue Kala from the death gallows. Tho grateful, the Indian does not believe Don del Oro wanted him to die so he could lead his people on a war of revenge. He promises to take Zorro, alone, to Don del Oro and prove he is a god and not a white man that has stolen into Don del Oro's body.



When they arrive at the ceremonial cave, the golden suit of armor is found on the throne. Lifting off the headpiece, Zorro shows Kala it is empty. Now convinced Don del Oro is a false god, Kala (with Zorro) seeks out Tarmac and the others to show them their idol is no more than a "shell of gold."

Returning to the ceremonial cave, Zorro and Kala are surprised to see the suit of armor stand! Don del Oro orders: "Death to the unbeliever!"

Zorro pulls out his gun: "Stop them or I'll shoot." Don del Oro announces that as God of the Yaquis he cannot be harmed. Zorro fires one shot, but it merely dents the armor.

The Indians advance on Zorro and with their spears drive him slowly, relentlessly, toward a burning volcanic pit. End of Chapter 11.

Zorro hurdles the opening, grabs a keg of powder, and throws it into the hole. There's a terrific explosion. During the confusion, Zorro and Kala hide in a small crevice in the ceremonial cave. They overhear Don del Oro tell Tarmac to arm the Indians. He, as a councilor, will return to San Mendolito and dispatch the military on a false mission. Then, at high noon, Don del Oro will lead the attack on the city himself.

When the council meets, Zorro appears and asserts that one of its members is Don del Oro. Henchmen enter and a sword duel breaks out. During this, Felipe, Pablo and Gonzales leave the room and take to their horses. All three appear at the ceremonial cave and one puts on the golden suit of armor. The other two are shot by Don del Oro: "My identity will never be known now."

But his unmasking comes in short order. Zorro appears at the cave and engages in a struggle with Don del Oro. Each tries to throw the other into the volcanic fire pit. Zorro manages to get a grasp on the helmet and twists it from Don del Oro's head revealing the face of Pablo. Enraged to see their leader is a false god, the Indians advance on Pablo with their spears and drive him into the fire pit.

Kala becomes chief of the Yaquis; Ramon the governor; and, Don Diego Vega takes leave for California. THE END.

GEORGE J. LEWIS / The Face is Familiar

By C. M. PARKHURST

During the '30's and '40's there was a small army of actors whose presence on the screen set the mood for the scene to follow. They appeared in film after film playing hero or heavy, in large and small doses, working hard at their trade.

One of the busiest and best known character actors of the "Golden Age of the Serials" was George J. Lewis. His career began in silent pictures and continued through sound films and into television in the '60's.

In an exclusive TEMI interview George J. Lewis spoke of his start in pictures. "We did anything and everything in those days. For example, very early in my career I worked in a picture with Rin-Tin-Tin doubling one of the heavies. I was to escape by swimming away from a boat and Rinty was to swim after me, attack me in the water and leave me for dead. The dog had been trained to retrieve a rabbit's foot which was put under the collar of my jacket. The dog grabbed my collar and shook it until the rabbit's foot came loose, making it look as if he'd attacked me. Incidentally, Rinty was a bit of a ham. He would work only when the cameras were rolling and in order to rehearse him the cameraman would remove the film from the camera and pretend to be shooting the action. Later (in 1933) I starred in the serial THE WOLF DOG with Rin-Tin-Tin, Jr. for Mascot Pictures."

L. to R. Frankie Darro (head bandaged), Lewis, Hale Hamilton and Donald Reed.

"The workday started very early. We would leave for locations around 6:30 in the morning. There were times at Mascot when we would position lights and shoot close-ups until daylight, then work until sundown. There was very little rehearsal. We would run through the scene once or twice and then shoot it. But even though the days were long and hard, and the pay not too good, they were enjoyable times."

Except for two short periods, George has always been a freelance actor shuttling between Universal, Mascot, MGM, Columbia, RKO, Republic and other studios. "From 1925 to 1929 I was under contract to Universal, and it was there I made 'His People' one of my first starring roles and one of my personal favorites. I recently saw a 16mm print. Even after all these years, it's still a good picture and fun to watch. During 1930, under contract to Fox, I made a series of Spanish remakes of American films. In one of them, 'The Big Trail,' I had the same role John Wayne played in the English language version. Adele Mara, later one of Republic's top stars, also worked in some of them."

From 1940 on George appeared in nearly two dozen serials, including some of the worst and best examples of the serial form. Roles varied from unbilled walk-ons (SPY SMASHER, SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA) to star billing (ZORRO'S BLACK WHIP, FEDERAL OPERATOR 99). Asked about his many unbilled performances George replied candidly: "Remember, acting was what I did for a living and a day's work meant a day's pay." Also included among his credits during the '40's were PERILS OF NYOKA ('42), G-MEN VS. THE BLACK DRAGON ('43), DAREDEVILS OF THE WEST ('43), THE TIGER WOMAN ('44), HAUNTED HARBOR ('44), CAPTAIN AMERICA ('44), THE PHANTOM RIDER ('46) and GHOST OF ZORRO ('49).

Lewis (as Morgan) with Linda Stirling in THE TIGER WOMAN (Republic, 1944).

"The second period under contract came late in my career. From 1957 to 1960, working for Walt Disney, I had the role of Don Alejandro de la Vega, father of Don Diego de la Vega, in the 'Zorro' series. Walt was a great man, and loved by everyone. Even the carpenters and laborers called him 'Walt' at his insistence. He had a personal interest in everyone, and the three years spent at the Disney Studios were among the most enjoyable I've had in pictures." On the patio of George's home is a deck chair with "ZORRO'S DAD" painted on the backrest, a present given to him by the crew when filming on the series ended.

"One of the problems with Hollywood was that after growing up in the picture business playing juvenile leads and heroes, it was difficult for them to see me as anything else. So, for five years (1936 into 1940) I worked in New York City on the stage and in radio playing every type of role: gangsters, villains, and really no-good characters. When I returned to Hollywood my work in New York had added a new dimension, and established me as a versatile actor."

In 1943 George added the middle initial "J" (for Joseph) to his name to avoid confusion with two other George Lewis' prominent in show business at the same time — one a jazz musician and the other a burlesque comic.

L. to R. Noel Cravat (Ranga), Nino Pipitone (Haruchi) and Lewis (Lugo) in G-MEN VS. THE BLACK DRAGON (Rep., '43).

After playing heavies in many serials, most notably as Lugo in G-MEN VS. THE BLACK DRAGON and Matson in CAPTAIN AMERICA, George switched with ease to the role of leading man Vic Gordon in ZORRO'S BLACK WHIP.

Linda Stirling (Barbara Meredith) and Lewis in ZORRO'S BLACK WHIP (Rep., 1944).

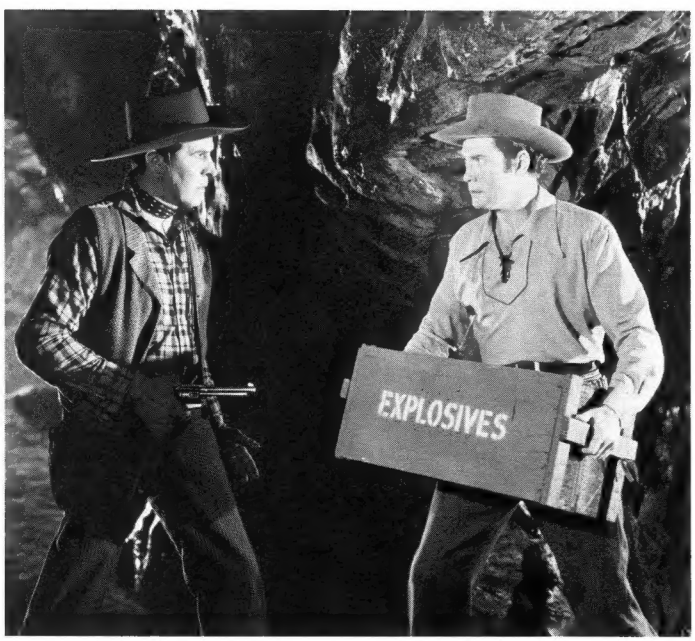
"During the war years there was a shortage of leading men and the producer, Ronald Davidson, thought that without my mustache I could play the hero. I was almost too old (40 at the time) but he was willing to gamble on me, and I knew it was probably my last chance to play a lead, so I really enjoyed the part. "Besides," he added with a laugh, "I had played so many heavies that my daughter Maylo's friends used to pity her. They would see me in films and I was always so mean they believed I was really that way, and they felt sorry for her."

George's next serial had him back on the side of evil as Jim Belmont in FEDERAL OPERATOR 99. He added a note of refinement to the role by playing "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano while thinking up new ways to eliminate the hero (Jerry Blake, played by Marten Lamont). "There are three types of heavies in pictures, and I worked my way up from henchman to action heavy and finally to the 'brain' heavy in FEDERAL OPERATOR 99."

Helen Talbot (Joyce Kingston), Lewis, Lorna Gray (Rita Parker) in FEDERAL OPERATOR 99 (Rep., 1945).

Asked if there was ever a time during the making of a serial when he was in real danger, George answered: "No, not really. The people who worked in pictures were professionals and knew exactly what they were doing. The stuntmen in particular taught me a lot about timing. They made me look good in those fights when I wasn't being doubled." George singled out Dale Van Sickel and Ken Terrell as being "two of the very best in the business."

"Actually, for me the difficult part of working in serials was the dialogue. It was geared for a young audience and it was necessary to make it sound believable. Since the stress was mostly on action, trying to sound believable with dialogue that might be a little stilted and too explanatory for a young mind was a challenge."



Lewis (Rafe Henley) and Clayton Moore (Jesse James) in ADVENTURES OF FRANK AND JESSE JAMES (Rep., 1948).

Charles Middleton (Cassib), Lorna Gray (Vultura) and Lewis (Batan) seeking information from Kay Aldridge (Nyoka) in PERILS OF NYOKA (Rep., 1942).

Seated is John Davidson (Gruber); middle, Lionel Atwill (Doctor Maldor / The Scarab), and Lewis in CAPTAIN AMERICA (Rep., 1944).

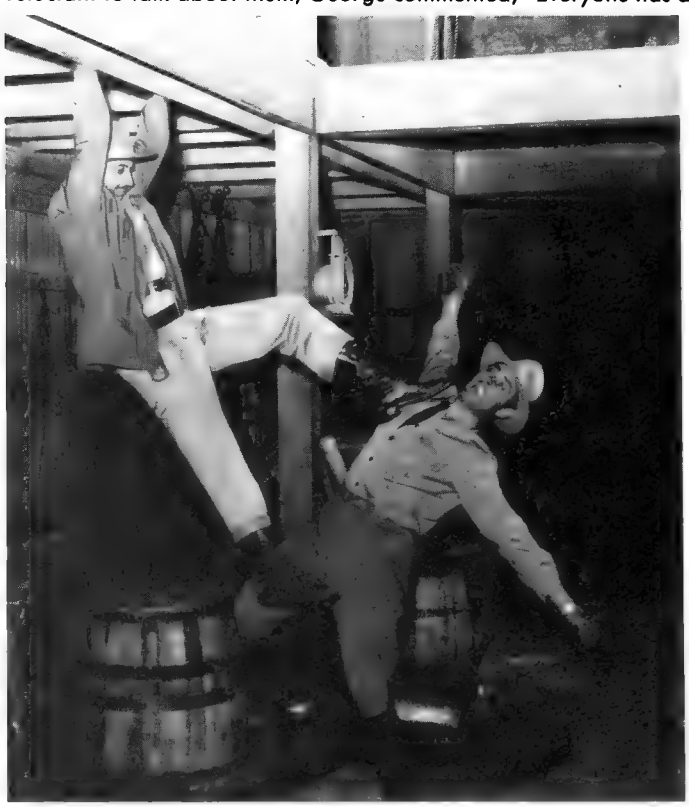
"There was a family feeling at Republic Studios in the '40's. The same crews worked together in many pictures and, believe me, I used to look forward to going to work. Republic's specialty was serials and westerns, and they had excellent production values whereas the other studios went more for names."

With the decline in serial production in the '50's, George continued to work in feature pictures and television until retiring from films. Then he devoted full time to his real estate business. "I've been a licensed real estate broker since my return from New York in 1940. Between pictures I worked at it until eventually I was spending more time selling real estate than acting and finally quit films altogether."

Reminded that some of the people who worked in serials are reluctant to talk about them, George commented, "Everyone has a different viewpoint. For some it's reliving the past; more are interested in the present." The present for George J. Lewis consists of enjoying full retirement since closing his real estate office and playing plenty of golf, his current hobby. "When I was active in pictures my hobby was bicycle riding. I used to ride my bike to and from the studio and around the lot, but during the past few years my wife and I have become avid golfers."

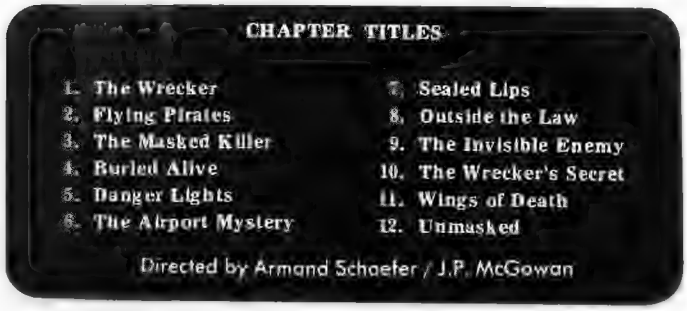
Married 43 years to his charming wife, Mary Louise, future plans include a cross-country auto tour playing the nation's top golf courses as they go.

George J. Lewis appeared frequently and with great versatility in serials, and TEMI thanks him for sharing some of his thoughts and experiences with its readers.



Lewis battling Allan Lane (Allen Saunders) in THE TIGER WOMAN.

Lewis clowning on the set of ZORRO'S BLACK WHIP.



Photos and Story / JAMES A. STRINGHAM

EDITOR'S NOTES: John Wayne is a living legend. He made his initial movie appearance in the late 1920's — and he is still active today as a "star."

For his acting in "True Grit" (1969) he received an Academy Award. TV Guide magazine (11/11/72) described Wayne's performance thusly: "His part is a natural: Rooster Cogburn, a one-eyed, swaggering cuss of a U.S. Marshal who looks too old and too fat for the job. To 14-year-old Mattie Ross, he looks perfect — someone who's got 'true grit' and can track down the man who killed her father."

Obviously a youthful Wayne evidenced some of that "grit" forty years ago when Nat Levine, head of Mascot Pictures, gave him the role of hero in his second of three serials, THE HURRICANE EXPRESS (released 8/1/1932). A 25-year-old John Wayne is called upon to "track down the man" who killed his own father.

Today John Wayne is 65. Up until now, Mr. Wayne's three cliff-hangers have received minimum attention in TEMI (pgs. 14 and 18). The oversight is certainly a discourtesy to him, and to his fans.

Not very long ago, Jim Stringham saw a revival of THE HURRICANE EXPRESS, and in the form it should be, a chapter a week. After each screening he returned home and recorded what he saw, and, for the most part, enjoyed. From his notes he has written the EXPRESS narrative.

While TEMI, with a few exceptions, is dedicated to covering serials in their chronological order of release (supplemented by special features) plans are now to go back from time to time and revisit some serials that were given thin coverage in prior Chapters.

For the record: John Wayne was top-billed in a trio of Mascot serials. So far as "The Eagle" in THE SHADOW OF THE EAGLE ('32), "The Wrecker" in THE HURRICANE EXPRESS ('32), and the masked "El Shaitan" in THE THREE MUSKETEERS ('33) were concerned, Wayne was a two-eyed, guileless and bothersome cuss who looked too young and too slender for the job! Yet Wayne bested them in Chapter 12, in every case, thru "true grit."

Mascot Pictures' THE HURRICANE EXPRESS (released August, 1932, and covered briefly on page 14) was an enjoyable adventure which featured as fair a solution to its mystery as was offered in any sound serial. In contrast to other improbable — or impossible — characters unmasked as Mascot mystery villains, the real identity of ***The Wrecker***, seeming mad enemy of a great railroad, was inevitable and his actions part of a logical plot.

Chapter one is quick to convey the intense rivalry between Walter Gray's airline and the L & R's Railroad and introduces Jim Baker (J. Farrell MacDonald), engineer of the L & R's crack "Hurricane Express," and his son Larry (John Wayne), a pilot employed by Gray (Lloyd Whitlock). Gloria Martin (Shirley Grey), secretary to the manager of the L & R, joins Gray and other passengers on Larry's flight.

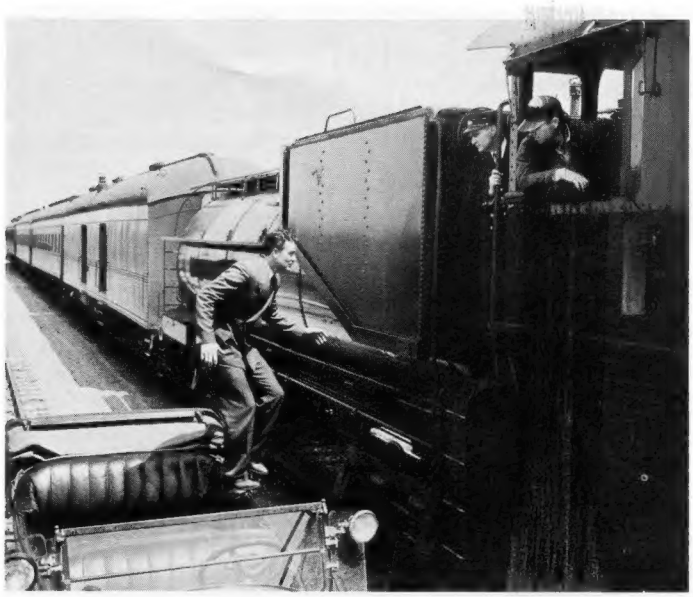
When train #57 is ordered to a siding to permit passage of the Express, a mysterious figure strikes down the engineer and the signal is not received. Overhead, Gloria is horrified to see the trains approaching collision. She warns Larry who disregards Gray's orders and lands near a switch. He smashes the lock almost in time to send #57 to safety, but the Express crashes into its rear. Jim Baker, still trying to brake the engine, is killed instantly. Larry is fired for the unauthorized landing. He vows vengeance for his father's murder.

Gloria overhears speculation that Stratton (Edmund Breese), escaped convict imprisoned for embezzlement from the L & R, may be taking the revenge he promised and slips away. She arrives where he is gloating over news of the wreck, received on a concealed telegraph set. She reveals herself as his daughter, but fails to persuade him to return to captivity until she can find proof of his innocence.

The railroad's manager, Edwards (Tully Marshall), and legal counsel Stevens (Conway Tearle) hold a hearing on the crash. Carlson (Al Bridge) who had signalled #57, states that he saw the engineer, Jordan (Matthew Betz), in the cab. Jordan is fired and threatens the company. Later, Stevens tells Edwards that he doubts the engineer's guilt. The manager admits his own doubts and explains that he fired the man in hopes of convincing customers that this would end the series of "accidents" plaguing the railroad. He persuades one important client that a large gold shipment can go safely on the Express that night. Minutes later Stevens and Edwards receive a strange telephone message. A telegraph key clicks out a Morse code warning that the Express will not go through — signed ***The Wrecker***.

Gloria follows her father aboard the gold train. Gray and Jordon also sneak aboard. Baker goes to question Carlson, and finds the station agent bound. Gunmen appear as he shouts a warning of an attack on the Express. Larry leaps through a window and drives off as the heavies follow.

On the train, an unseen figure drags the conductor into a dark compartment. Moments later, his double leaves the room and passes through the gold car where he steals the keys. The stage is set for what with music and improved editing could have been an outstanding cliffhanger. But what is presented is still very effective.



Larry Baker races to overtake the Express, followed by gunmen firing at his car. Ahead, more gangsters have placed a boxcar across the tracks. As the conductor, ***The Wrecker*** goes to the engine where he guns down the guard and fireman. The engineer struggles with him, but is felled as Larry's car pulls alongside. The young pilot transfers aboard and attacks ***The Wrecker***.

Larry is knocked out and his mysterious enemy climbs to the roof of the train where he discards the conductor's cap, jacket . . . and face, as he removes a lifelike mask. Seconds later a small bi-plane swoops down and he leaps to a rope ladder hanging from the craft. Larry struggles to consciousness. Then, the engine smashes into ***The Wrecker's*** barricade

Following episodes continued in lively, if improbable, fashion. Stratton escapes with the engine and gold car. Gloria sees him and runs to board the engine followed by Larry. They convince him they are acting for the railroad. ***Wrecker*** henchmen machine gun the engine from one of Gray's tri-motor transports. Larry watches them load the gold into the plane, then overpowers the pilot. He kicks a gangster from the ship, then takes off with the others. Machine gun fire sends the plane into a flaming crash.

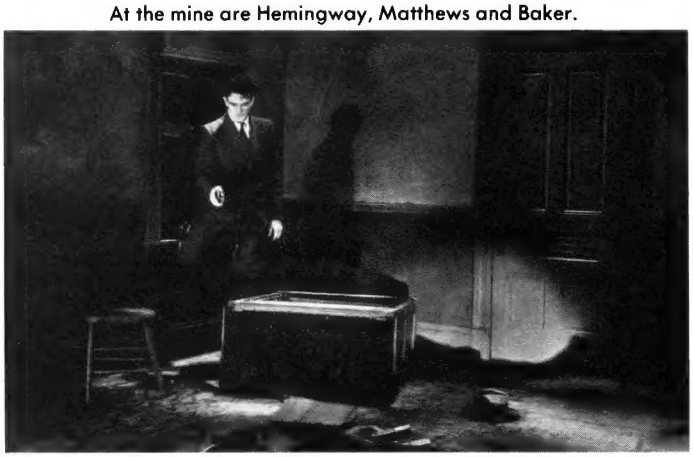
Gloria, Stratton and Larry Baker.

All parachute to safety near the wreckage; Larry goes to a nearby farmhouse to borrow a car. Stratton hides the gold, puts Gloria aboard a train, then disappears. Gangsters circle railroad detectives approaching the disabled engine and steal their car. Racing to the wrecked plane, they capture Baker, who had returned to find only two small gold bars which had fallen from a smashed case. They separate to search for the treasure, and, when Larry's guard spots the two bars, the pilot overpowers him and flees. He escapes over a trestle just ahead of a train. His pursuers leap to safety as it destroys their own car. Taken aboard they claim to have been chasing a thief. They spot Gloria as a passenger and phone ahead at the first stop. A false taxi picks her up at the station . . . just as Larry drives up to see ***Wrecker*** men following the vehicle. He follows in turn and sees her taken to an unused building in the railroad yards. ***The Wrecker*** appears — Gray! Larry covers the gang and frees Gloria. He is quickly jumped and battles the heavies as ***The Wrecker*** escapes, dropping a mask of Walter Gray. Larry is knocked from the platform and falls to the tracks. A train passes over his body!

L. to R. are Barney (Ernie Adams), Jim (Glenn Strange), Gray (Lloyd Whitlock), Larry (John Wayne) and another heavy (Al Ferguson).

Stratton reappears in later episodes offering to return the gold in exchange for papers proving his innocence. ***The Wrecker***, as Edwards, appears with them. Stratton takes him to a nearby mine, but Gloria arrives and exposes the imposter. Larry and railroad detectives enter the scene and ***The Wrecker*** fires a shot into a case of dynamite, detonating a blast that threatens the entire group.

At the mine are Hemingway, Matthews and Baker.



Later, The Wrecker assumes Larry's identity and supposedly has shot him at the end of Chapter nine. In reality the master criminal has only stunned him with a chair which draws blood . . . and he returns in Chapter ten (still as "Larry") and carries the unconscious hero to his getaway car, then to his hideout.

In another fight at the mine, Edwards sees his double enter a Gray transport plane. He overpowers the man and tears off his mask — only to be shot down as he learns The Wrecker's secret. Gray is arrested for the murder, but freed by Wrecker henchmen. [L. to R. Edwards (Tully Marshall), and detectives Matthews (Joe Girard) and Hemingway (James Brutis).]

The final chapter is disappointing. Larry and Stratton lure the gang into an ambush, but are in turn surprised and pinned down by a machine gunner. Detective Matthews (Joe Girard) had been shot down in the previous episode, but appears unharmed in time to save them. In a particularly irritating economy move, the machine gunner is never shown. He is indicated only by off-screen sound effects.

Stratton returns the gold, and Stevens prepares to ship it out on the Express. ***The Wrecker***, as Jordan, plans to stop the train where his men will be waiting. Gray, held captive by the gang, escapes to tell Larry and Gloria of the plot. Larry and Stratton overpower the heavies at Ash Fork Station as ***The Wrecker*** battles the engine crew. Larry pursues the train in his car. ***The Wrecker*** fells the engineer as Baker swings aboard. They fight for the master criminal's gun, which explodes. The Wrecker falls, and Larry stops the train. [Author's note: This climax is simply a tamer version of the chapter one cliffhanger.]

Detectives and train crew run up as Larry carries "Gray" from the engine, but Jordan and the real Gray appear. ***The Wrecker is unmasked as Stevens***. Dying, he confesses his plan to acquire the huge railroad. He had framed Stratton for his own embezzlements (and convinced him that Edwards was responsible) to advance himself to second in command of the L & R. He had murdered Edwards to become acting manager. His attacks lowered the value of the railroad, and he would buy it with the stolen gold. Gray would then be killed as ***The Wrecker***, regaining for the L & R its immense worth and eliminating its competitor. As he tells how close he came to success, Stevens dies.

Stratton will take control of the railroad; and Gray, concerned by the rivalry which had served ***The Wrecker*** so well, proposes they join railroad and airline in a truly modern transportation company. Larry accepts the job of chief pilot for the new company. Then, the conductor orders the group back to the train announcing, "The Hurricane Express must go through."

THOSE ENDURING SERIAL FANS

Letters from TEMI fans are most welcome. However, the information supplied in these columns by readers is based on their opinions. The editor does not necessarily purport the info to be complete, exact or accurate.

ERRATUM AND ADDENDA

The actor identified as (?) in DICK TRACY'S G-MEN on page 251 is Bernard Suss. He also appeared in DAREDEVILS OF THE RED CIRCLE and can be seen in photo 15, page 237, second from right.

Woody Langley
Studio City, Calif.

Mr. Tuska, in his article on page 240, is not 100% accurate. He states BLAZING THE OVERLAND TRAIL, the last American studio serial, released by Columbia in 1956, was created by means of shooting around substantial segments of OVERLAND WITH KIT CARSON (Columbia, 1939), with Dennis Moore costumed identically to Bill Elliott in the earlier entry, and Lee Roberts dressed as Richard Fiske. The facts are Moore was indeed costumed as Elliott, but Gregg Barton was dressed as Richard Fiske — and Lee Roberts was outfitted to resemble Buck Jones as he appeared in WHITE EAGLE (1941) so footage from that serial could be interpolated into OVERLAND TRAIL.

James A. Stringham
Lansing, Mich.

In reference to a photo on page 226 showing Eddy Waller (correct spelling is Eddy, and not Eddie as you have it) with Robert Fiske and Charles Whittaker. The unidentified man in front of Whittaker and leaning over the table listening to Waller and Fiske is J.P. McGowan, famous director and featured player. He directed the first 48 episodes of THE HAZARDS OF HELEN (1914) that starred Helen Holmes, and many other serals.

Edward R. Billings
Nashua, N.H.

Editor's Note: J.P. McGowan was also co-director of HURRICANE EXPRESS, covered elsewhere in this Chapter.

* * *

NECROLOGY

Sadly, these are three more additions to "Chapter 13". Al Ferguson died Dec. 4, 1971. He was born in Ireland in April, 1890. He was in many silent and sound serials, including being cast as Fergie in BLAZING THE OVERLAND TRAIL (1956). Marin Sais died on Dec. 31, 1971. She was married to cowboy star Jack Hoxie, and played Calamity Jane in DEADWOOD DICK — a Columbia serial in 1940.

Also, Lane Chandler died on October 14, 1972. He was in THE LONE RANGER, DEADWOOD DICK, UNDERSEA KINGDOM, THE SPIDER'S WEB and MANHUNT OF MYSTERY ISLAND.

John Stoginski
Chicago, Ill.

ENIGMA

With regards to THE GREAT ADVENTURES OF WILD BILL HICKOK (pgs. 226 & 227). Altho it is quoted the writers being unusually honest and fair in providing escapes from Chapter endings, there is at least one episode cliff-hanger which I have always regarded as "a bit of fiddle-faddle"." That is number six, "The Apache Killer." The Killer (played by Richard Cramer) boasts that he can out-draw and kill Hickok. He is therefore hired by Morrell (Robert Fiske) to do just that. The reward for the killing of Hickok is a large sum of money. "Consider the job done and have the money ready for me!" gloats Cramer evilly.

Hickok (Bill Elliott) is in the saloon, at the bar with some friends, when in comes The Apache Killer — his guns ready. Hickok spots him in the bar mirror. There is a cut to outside the saloon, and we hear the shots ring out. Next moment, out comes the Killer, grinning evilly (in typical Richard Cramer style), and replacing his guns in their holsters! What has happened to Bill Hickok?

Comes next week. The aforementioned scenes are repeated. Killer Cramer grins evilly once again and replaces his guns. Suddenly his grin changes to a look of anguish, and he pitches forward, falling to the ground. He is dead!!! Next moment, out steps Hickok, replacing ***his*** guns in their holsters, looking as cool as a cucumber!!??

H.W. Seacombe
London, England

BEHIND THE SCENES

When the script called for an airplane crash with a train, the special-effects men of Republic Studios got out their tools. Poised on the track is a miniature of a Jap army freight train. Above it is the airplane, which is to plunge down upon the moving freight and blow it to destruction. The plane is suspended on hairlike wires, and will slide down from a 40-foot platform. An electric motor and pulley serve as the motive power to pull the freight cars on their track. The plane will be loaded with small powder bombs and balloons filled with gasoline, so that it will explode and catch fire.

Before the cameras roll, the crewman (top) lines up the plane to make sure it will hit the train at the proper angle. Supports shown are removed before filming.

Next photo, a fraction of a second before the explosion. "Burning" plane is gliding down to wreck the train. Cameramen work in bombproof hut to guard camera equipment from flying debris. Scenes like this cost several thousand dollars to stage. Below, debris fills air as plane hits train and both blow up.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This sequence is from "Flying Tigers" (1942). Republic never did use it in a serial, per se, but did make effective use of the footage in the preview for THE CRIMSON GHOST (1946).

Originally this article appeared in "Popular Mechanics" magazine in March of 1944. It was sent in by Howard Schweig, Nashville, Tenn., to share with TEMI readers.

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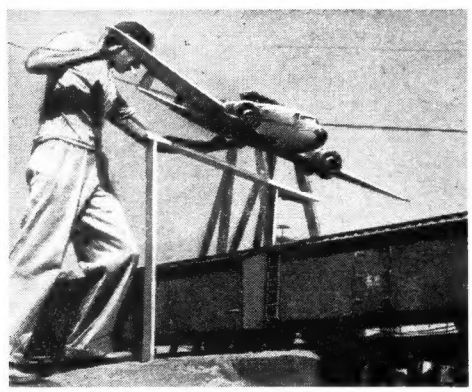

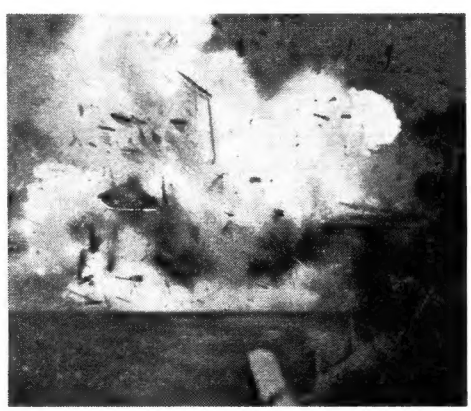

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